

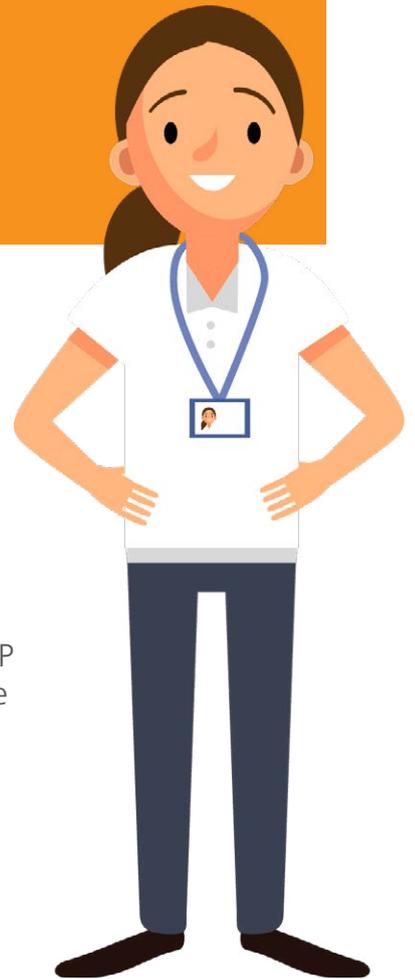
AHP support workforce – understanding education, qualifications and development



Introduction

This guide provides a brief overview of the formal education and development opportunities that assist support worker learning, including Functional Skills and Technical levels (T levels).

It is one of several associated Guides that HEE has published to support the [**AHP Support Worker Competency, Education and Career Development Framework**](#). The Framework is one element of HEE's AHP workforce strategy, which aims to build capacity and capability across the professions and secure the future workforce nationally, regionally and locally.



Education levels

Since 2015, all formal education qualifications in England and Wales have been placed within an overarching framework called the **Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)**.

The RQF distinguishes between different levels of understanding, cognition and expertise, with each level being progressively more challenging than the last. The RQF begins at Entry Level and progresses up to Level 8, which includes doctorates. Bachelor's degrees are placed in Level 6.

The RQF levels that are most relevant to support worker education and development are shown in the table on the next page, along with a brief description of the educational level of demand and examples of some of the qualifications linked to each level.



RQF level	AHP framework stage	Examples of qualifications associated with the level	Nature of learning
Entry	Pre-employment	Entry-level Diploma, ESOL	Basic knowledge and skill that can be applied in everyday situations
1	Pre-employment	GCSE D-G/3-1 Level 1 Certificate, Level 1 Diploma	Ability to apply learning with guidance
2	Entry Level	GCSE A*-C/9-4, Level 2 Certificate, Level 2 Diploma, National Diploma	Good knowledge and understanding of a subject, can perform a variety of tasks
3	Intermediate	A Levels, Level 3 National Certificate, Level 3 Diploma, Technical Levels, Senior Healthcare Support Worker apprenticeship	Can apply a range of knowledge, skills and understanding at a detailed level
4	Assistant Practitioner	Year one of a bachelor's degree, Higher National Certificate, Mammography Associate Apprenticeship	Specialist knowledge, involving detailed analysis of a high level of information in an area of work or study
5	Assistant Practitioner	Foundation degree, year two of a bachelor's degree, Higher National Diploma, Assistant Practitioner Apprenticeship	Ability to increase depth of knowledge and understanding of an area of work (or study), able to respond to complex problems and situations



Credits

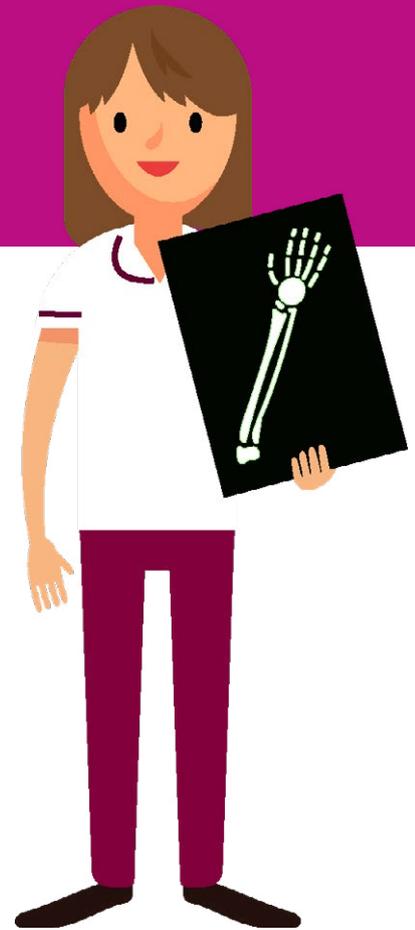
Credits are the means of formally recognising learning achievement within the RQF levels and their associated qualifications. Broadly speaking, one learning credit is equivalent to 10 hours of study and teaching. Together with the RQF, credits allow comparisons between qualifications at the same level.

Take the example of the Level 3 Senior Healthcare Support Worker apprenticeship standard (apprenticeships are discussed on page 10). “Level 3” here refers to the RQF level and gives a broad indication of equivalent qualifications, such as an A Level. The formal qualification within this apprenticeship is a Diploma, which in this case, on completion, provides the learner with 65 credits. One A Level A* award is worth 56 credits, as a comparison.

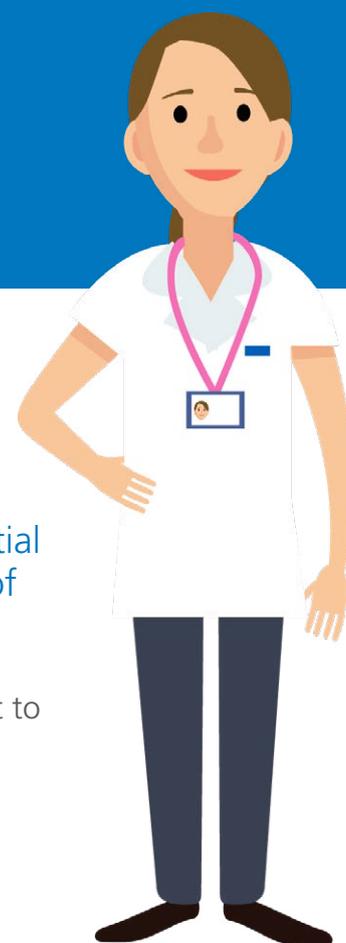
At each RQF level there are a large number of qualifications. Most are described as either ‘Certificates’ or ‘Diplomas’ (but there are also ‘Awards’). The difference between each of these is their size (credits):

- Awards are between 1-12 credits
- Certificates are between 13-36 credits
- Diplomas are 37 credits or above

Further information on UK qualifications, including the Qualifications and Credit Framework, is available [from UCAS](#).



Functional Skills



Functional Skills allow individuals, in both their work and personal lives, to operate confidently, safely, effectively and independently. An underpinning requirement of formal qualifications – as well as safe and effective care – it is essential that health and social care staff attain the appropriate level of Functional Skills in English and Mathematics.

There are three Functional Skill levels of attainment. These are different to RQF levels:

- Entry 1, Entry 2 and Entry 3
- Level 1 (equivalent to GCSE grades 1-3)
- Level 2 (equivalent to GCSE grade 4)

Most formal education programmes and qualifications relevant to health and social care, such as the apprenticeships, include the requirement to achieve a level 2 Functional Skill competence. While many NHS employers will often specify or imply a minimum level of Functional Skills (normally level 2) when recruiting new staff, these are not mandated.

There are several ways that staff can attain Functional Skills. Further information is available at the end of this document about support for staff wishing to improve their Functional Skills, including a HEE-funded (for one year) online training course.

Examples of prior qualifications that indicate employees or potential recruits have attained level 2 Functional Skills include (with minimum pass marks):

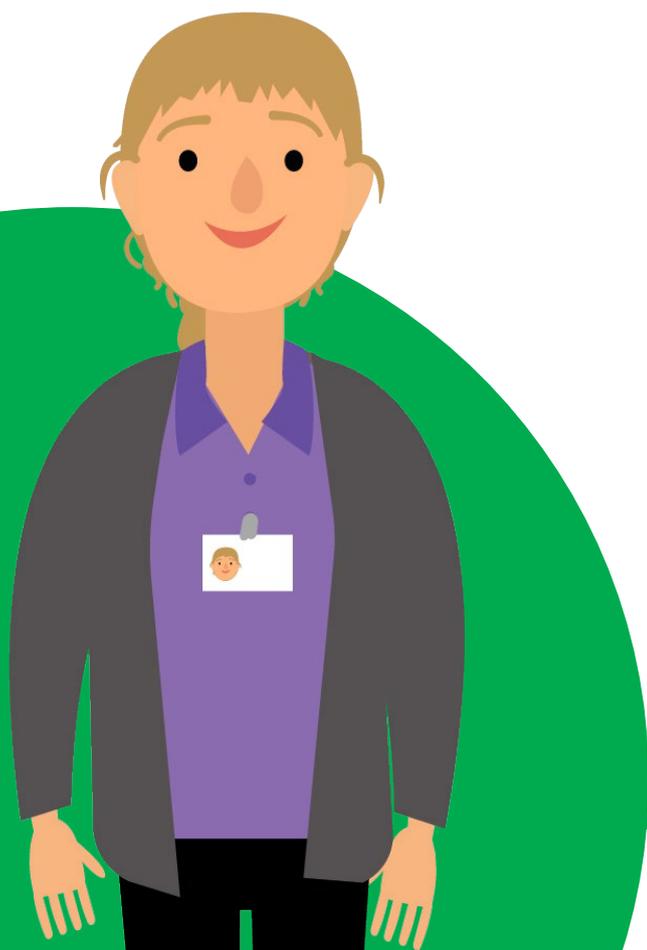
- GCSEs with 'English' or 'Mathematics' in their title (E or 2*)
- Functional Skills Level 1 (Pass)
- Technical, A or AS Levels (E)
- Level 1 or 2 Certificate in English Language, English Literature or Mathematics (Pass)
- British Sign Language Level 1 (Pass)

Digital skills



AHP support workers need to be digitally confident and competent, with an understanding of the potential of digital to improve care. Qualifications such as Technical Levels (see next section) include digital elements that not only address general application (for example in the use of spreadsheets) but also the application of digital skills in specific occupations. HEE has published a [**Digital Literacy Capability Framework**](#), which includes a self-assessment tool.

HEE's [**Digital competency framework for Allied Health Professionals**](#) has been developed to support the enhancement of digital competence (knowledge and skills associated with digital technology in practice) for all allied health professions from band 3 to band 9. It is intended to be a developmental and supportive tool that can enable all staff to meet their digital potential.



Technical Levels



Technical Levels (T) Levels launched in September 2020 and are new occupationally specific qualifications that follow on from GCSE study. They are equivalent to three A Levels and so should be recognised by universities in assessing applicants for degree courses. The top T Level grades (“Distinction*” and “Distinction”) are equivalent to AAA* and AAA with A Levels. T Levels last two years and, like apprenticeships (discussed in the next section), combine classroom teaching with work-guided experience, although the balance between the two is reversed compared to apprentices, with 80 per cent of T Level learning being classroom based, and 20 per cent being work-based.

There are three educational components to T Levels:

- A Technical Qualification (RQF Level 3)
- Industry Placements
- Functional Skills (Level 2)

The 20 per cent work-based element is in the form of industry placements, which need to total 315 hours (approximately 45 days). Placements can be day-release or take place over a block of time. They can also be shared by services and spread over the duration of study. This means that AHP services can work together and with others to provide students with experiences and exposure to the broad range of AHP and healthcare careers. T Level providers, mainly colleges, will support employers with the design and delivery of placements. Employers are encouraged to participate in the delivery of a course, for example through setting assignments or engaging with recruitment.

T Levels are available in a wide range of subjects such as accounting, catering, education, and childcare and human resources. From September 2021 there will be a total of three available that specifically relate to healthcare, which will be of relevance to AHPs (although students studying other T Levels may well be interested in NHS careers, including as AHP support workers). These are:

- Health T Level
- Healthcare Science T Level
- Science T Level

The Health T Level has the following core elements that all students will study:

- Working with the healthcare sector
- Health
- Safety and environmental regulations in health and social care
- Managing information and data
- Good scientific and clinical practice
- Core scientific concepts

T Levels also have specialist pathways. Within the Health T Level there is a Supporting the Therapy Teams pathway for instance. Laboratory Science and Food Science are available within the Science T Level, while the Healthcare Science T Level has the following specialisms within it:

- Pharmacy Services
- Assisting with Healthcare Science
- Dental Technical Services
- Prosthetic and Orthotic Services

T Levels present an opportunity for the NHS and social care employers to attract a new pool of young people into the AHP professions either via support worker employment or into AHP degrees/degree apprenticeships. They also underline the importance of local partnerships with education providers, as discussed in the [**AHP Support Workforce Guide on Grow Your Own.**](#)



Apprenticeships



Apprenticeship training costs are funded by the apprenticeship levy (0.5 per cent of pay bills), which is paid by all NHS trusts. Funds are used to cover the costs of training and cannot be used for back fill. Employers who do not use all their levy can transfer any underspend to other employers, including those in primary or social care.

Features of apprenticeships are:

- they contain a formal qualification, including degrees
- they last a minimum of a year
- they require 20 per cent of learning to be off-the-job and 80 per cent to be work-based
- training is for a specific **new** role for the individual
- health apprenticeships include the Care Certificate (page 12) and the requirement prior or through apprenticeship learning to attain Level 2 Functional Skills
- achievement of the apprenticeship is through **End Point Assessment**, which comprises a variety of assessment methods, including observation
- under certain circumstances, employers can deliver apprenticeships wholly or in partnership with a provider to their staff and that of other employers. When this occurs, apprenticeship levy funds can be returned to employers.

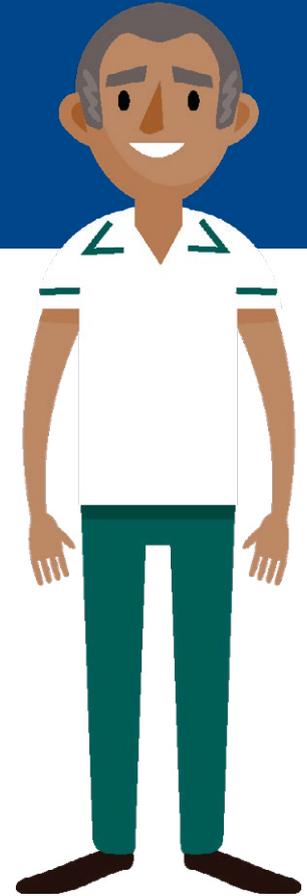
There are several apprenticeship standards directly relevant to the AHP support workforce. The following are applicable to all occupations:

- Healthcare Support Worker (RQF Level 2)
- Senior Healthcare Support Worker (RQF Level 3)
- Assistant Practitioner in Healthcare (RQF Level 5).

Full information about healthcare apprenticeships (and T Levels) is available from the [HASO website](#).

The Learning Mentor apprenticeship standard is an opportunity to build local capacity to support pre-registration students in placement, apprentices and, in the future, T Level students, through up-skilling support workers. This apprenticeship lasts 12 months, includes a Safeguarding qualification, and provides learners with competences pertaining to processes for effective mentoring (such as active listening and providing vocational and pastoral care) and providing mentor support.

Care Certificate



The **Care Certificate** is a national set of standards that set out the core competences expected of all health and social care support staff employed in patient- or client-facing roles. It was introduced in 2014 following the Cavendish Review of health and social care support worker education and development, and comprises the following 15 standards:

1. Understand your role
2. Your personal development
3. Duty of care
4. Equality and diversity
5. Work in a person-centred way
6. Communication
7. Privacy and dignity
8. Fluids and nutrition
9. Awareness of mental health, dementia and learning disabilities
10. Safeguarding adults
11. Safeguarding children
12. Basic life support
13. Health and safety
14. Handling information
15. Infection prevention and control

The Care Certificate forms part of the induction of all newly employed patient- and client-facing staff. All 15 standards should be completed and assessed before a support worker can be judged to be competent in their role. The Care Certificate forms an element (for those who have not previously undertaken it) of the Level 2 and 3 apprenticeships, which candidates can be directly recruited into.

Higher Development Award



The **Higher Development Award (HDA)** aims to build on the knowledge that support staff already hold and improve patient/service-user outcomes. It also provides education opportunities for those who would like to access pre-registration courses.

Following collaboration from employers and support workers in London in 2016, and with support from HEE, the award's modules were agreed and formed an Institute of Leadership and Management RQF level 3 leadership programme qualification. More recently, an RQF level 1/pre-entry-level HDA programme and an RQF level 2 intermediate programme qualification have also been designed.

The HDA is applicable to both NHS and social care support workers.

Bridging programmes into pre-registration degrees and degree apprenticeships

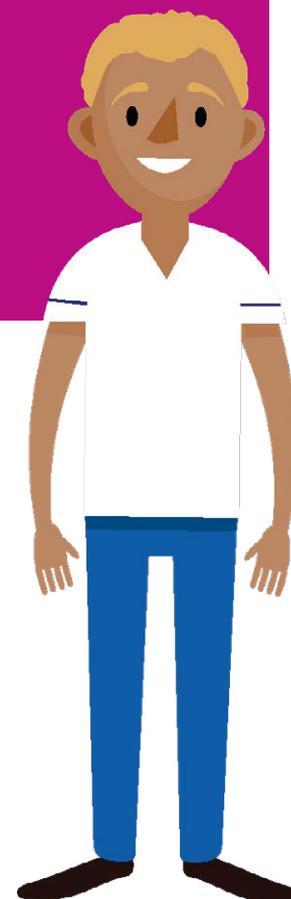
Support staff with RQF level 4 or 5 healthcare qualifications, including apprenticeships, should have acquired sufficient credits (plus experience) to apply for a degree/degree apprenticeship course. Depending on the university, they may also be able to have recognition of their previously acquired experience, knowledge and skills, and therefore receive exemption from elements of the degree programme (this is called Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning, or APEL).



However, staff entering RQF level 4, 5 or 6 programmes from the Entry or Intermediate Stages may not have the necessary credits, Functional Skills or study skills to progress to higher-level programmes. For example, the 65 credits acquired by staff who complete the Senior Healthcare Support Worker apprenticeship standards may not translate to sufficient UCAS points to allow applications to degree programmes. One way of addressing these gaps is through so-called Bridging or Access Programmes, which provide sufficient credits and course-relevant skills, including study skills. The Higher Development Award described in the previous section, although not developed as a step into higher education, is in fact recognised by London South Bank University to enable support staff to apply for their degree programmes. Many education providers run Bridging and Access courses; some general (Access into Higher Education Diploma, for example) and some health and/or profession specific.

An alternative solution is for universities and level 3 providers to work together and for the university to adjust the recruitment process for such candidates through progression agreements.

Further information



Full information about the range of qualifications associated with each level of the RQF: www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels

For information about how qualifications convert to tariff points for university, see: <https://www.ucas.com/files/tariff-tables-2021>

Skills for Health have a range of learning tools designed to support Functional Skills attainment: <https://haso.skillsforhealth.org.uk/free-online-learning-tools/>

Information for people about English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL): <https://haso.skillsforhealth.org.uk/news/new-esol-resource-published/>

The HEE-funded bksb Functional Skills online training: <https://haso.skillsforhealth.org.uk/news/functional-skills-learning-access-funded-by-hee/>

The HEE Digital Literacy Capability Framework: <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/digital-literacy>

Skills for Health Digital Skills learning resources: <https://haso.skillsforhealth.org.uk/free-online-learning-tools/#digital-skills-it->

For further information on Technical Levels, see:

www.Tlevels.gov.uk

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/introduction-of-t-levels/introduction-of-t-levels>

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/articles/what-are-t-levels>

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/articles/where-t-levels-fit-existing-routes>

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/articles/t-level-industry-placements-and-getting-started>

Acknowledgements

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